

Vocational Rehabilitation's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development are described below. This plan ensures an adequate supply of qualified rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals for the operation of the state vocational rehabilitation program.

1. Data System

Vocational Rehabilitation's system to collect personnel information provides annual data concerning the numbers and categories of personnel that are employed by the state agency as well as the projected retirements within five years. The numbers of personnel are then compared to the clients served to determine the projected number of staff needed, including the ratio of counselors to clients. Information on personnel development is described in Section 4 of this attachment.

There are currently 96.5 individuals employed by North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation. They are in the following categories:

✓ DSU Director.....	1
✓ Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.....	40
✓ Regional Support Staff	14.5
✓ State Office Administrators and Support Staff	11
✓ Regional Vocational Rehabilitation Administrators	8
✓ Vision Specialists	7
✓ Regional Human Service Center Directors	4
✓ Human Services Specialists/Aides.....	4.5
✓ Drivers	2
✓ Vocational Evaluator	0.5
✓ Supported Employment Coordinator	1
✓ Business Service Consultant	3

During FFY 2007, 6775 individuals were served by vocational rehabilitation. This results in an annual client to counselor ratio of 169 to 1. Vocational Rehabilitation attempts to hire counseling staff as necessary, based on projected caseload numbers. Current staffing is sufficient to provide Vocational Rehabilitation services. Hiring additional counseling staff will be dependent upon the need to maintain a reasonable counselor to client ratio and the availability of funding.

North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation has 33 staff who meet the Qualified Rehabilitation Professional (QRP) standards, 30 of whom are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC). This represents 69% of the staff who are required to meet QRP standards. We anticipate 4 additional staff will be eligible to sit for the CRC exam this fall, 2008. One vision rehab specialists also holds CRC certification.

In 2007 North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation's annual turnover rate was 7.8%. This is lower than the 2006 turnover rate of 9.5% and considerably lower than the 17% turnover rate experienced in 2005. Once again, at least 50% of the staff who left the agency indicated they left for higher salaries.

During the next five years we estimate 22.5 staff members will be leaving the agency due to retirement alone. The positions they hold are as follows:

✓ Central Office Administration	3
✓ Regional Human Service Center Directors	0
✓ Regional Administrators	3
✓ Rehabilitation Counselors	5
✓ Rehabilitation Vision Specialists	2
✓ Vocational Evaluators	0.5
✓ Secretaries/Support Staff	7
✓ Human Service Aides	0
✓ Drivers	2

We recognize that we will be losing valuable experience and managerial knowledge with the high level of retirees who are currently administrators in the regional and central offices. Therefore, in January 2007 we launched the "*Success in Leadership*" initiative as a major aspect of our succession planning efforts. There are currently nine members and each will serve a 3-year term. We are already seeing some exciting things happening with this group.

The purpose of *Success in Leadership* is to challenge individuals to become positive forces of change in the field of Vocational Rehabilitation by adopting and implementing exemplary leadership practices. All staff, regardless of their position, are able to apply to become part of *Success in Leadership*. We believe it is important for all staff to be able to expand their knowledge, skills and abilities by participating in quality training on their path to leadership.

There are no colleges in the state that offer a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, consequently counselor job openings are mailed to universities in the Region VIII states that offer a Master's Degree in rehabilitation counseling. The universities will post all counselor openings.

The table below depicts the out-of-state institutions that are providing training to North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation staff who are required to meet Qualified Rehabilitation

Professional standards: Regional VR Administrators and VR Counselors. The table also depicts training sites used by North Dakota Vision Rehabilitation Specialists. The numbers enrolled and graduated are for FFY 2007.

Institutions Providing Training To North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation Staff

Rehabilitation Professional	Area of Study	Institution of Higher Ed	Number Enrolled (10/1/06 – 09/30/07)	Number Graduated (10/1/06 – 09/30/07)
Regional Administrator	Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling	Utah State University	0	0
		Montana State University-Billings	0	0
		Wisconsin-Stout	0	0
VR Counselor	Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling	Utah State University	3	0
		Montana State University	4	0
		Wisconsin-Stout	0	0
Vision Rehabilitation Specialist	Coursework and training identified to meet the needs of North Dakota consumers	Pennsylvania College of Optometry	0	0
		University of Northern Colorado	0	0
		University of Little Rock Arkansas	0	0
		ND School for the Blind – Orientation and Mobility Training (Thru University of North Dakota Continuing Education)	0	0

2. Recruitment and Retention

Vocational Rehabilitation lists all counselor job openings with Job Service North Dakota, specifying a preference for individuals with a Master's Degree in rehabilitation counseling with credentials to qualify for certification. We will also consider the possibility of paid internships as an incentive to attract Master's level interns with the intention of retaining them for counselor openings.

Vocational Rehabilitation recruits minorities and individuals from graduate programs in rehabilitation counseling, however, universities in our state do not offer a Master's Degree in rehabilitation counseling. Therefore, we are forced to recruit graduate level counselors from out-of-state. We are often unsuccessful in this effort because in most instances, our salaries are not competitive at the graduate level. If we are successful in recruiting graduate level counselors, we often find it difficult to retain them for the same reason.

Vocational Rehabilitation recruits individuals with disabilities and provides reasonable accommodations needed to perform essential job functions. Reasonable accommodations include readers, drivers, and adaptive equipment for current staff with disabilities.

Three strategies continuing from last year specifically address recruitment and retention. They are found in *Attachment 4.11(d), Goal 8, Strategies 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5*. In summary, the strategies include a *Success in Leadership* project to study retention, strategies to work with the SRC Resource Committee, Designated State Agency Human Resources Division and others to look at pay equity and reclassification for VR staff and recruitment strategies for American Indians and other minority groups.

3. Personnel Standards

Vocational Rehabilitation has established the following policy to ensure that professionals providing Vocational Rehabilitation services are appropriately and adequately trained to meet "Qualified Rehabilitation Professional Standards" consistent with nationally recognized certification requirements:

- 1) Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC),**
- 2) Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling or**
- 3) Master's in a closely related field and eligibility to sit for the CRC.**

- A. Vocational Rehabilitation will hire rehabilitation counselors who hold a Master's Degree in rehabilitation counseling or closely related field from a Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredited program and who hold CRC certification or could obtain such certification within 3 years of the date of hire. If unable to recruit individuals who meet these qualifications, Vocational Rehabilitation will hire the most appropriate and qualified applicant with the expectation that the individual hired will participate in educational programs to meet "Qualified Rehabilitation Professional" standards within 5 years of the date of hire.
- B. Individuals who do not meet personnel standards will develop a training plan that will identify how they will meet the personnel standards. The plan will also include time lines for meeting the personnel standard which must be approved by their regional administrator and the Central Office Training Coordinator.
- C. At the present time, individuals requiring retraining to meet the personnel standards enroll in Utah State University's Distance Education Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling program, the Montana State University - Billings Distance Education Program, and the University of Wisconsin - Stout to complete the educational requirement for qualified rehabilitation personnel standards.

At present, and pending new awards of the RSA Long-Term Training/CSPD Scholarships, funding support for the training of counselors and regional administrators is primarily from RSA scholarships through Utah State University, Montana State University - Billings, and the University of Wisconsin - Stout. The Utah State University scholarship for spring and summer semester 2008 covers one-half tuition, a book stipend and \$1000 allowance for summer on-campus courses. At this time it is not know if this level of funding will be maintained for the remainder of the grant cycle. Montana State University - Billings covers the cost of tuition and fees. The University of Wisconsin Stout covers half of the tuition and fee costs. Costs not covered by the scholarships are covered by Vocational Rehabilitation's 110 funds with limited funding from the In-Service Training Grant.

The priority system for assisting staff in meeting personnel standards is as follows:

- 1. Current staff who have a Bachelor's Degree.
- 2. New hires who enter the system as under fills.
- 3. Current staff within five years to retirement.

In 1999, North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation's QRP standards were implemented. The goal established at implementation was that 50% of staff on board October 1, 1999 would meet the QRP standards by October 2004 and 100% by October 2009. All staff hired after that date are required to meet QRP standards within 5 years of hire. Currently, 91% of the original staff meet the QRP standards, far surpassing the goal. Staff hired after that date have either met the standard or are in the process of doing so as required.

4. Staff Development

Vocational Rehabilitation conducts an assessment of the training needs of the current staff at all levels- administrative, counselor, and support staff. The needs assessment focuses on two levels of training (1) statewide training topics that are consistent with the State Plan and RSA priorities, and (2) regional training that addresses issues identified through case reviews, performance appraisals and other training that will assist staff in progressing toward their career goals.

In-service training provides for attendance at workshops, conferences, formal course work training in rehabilitation counseling, medical assessment, ethics, job placement, rehabilitation technology, ADA, reauthorization, and other rehabilitation related training. All employees have access to these training opportunities. The agency's continuing education program also allows reimbursement for the cost of tuition and books for classes that are related to job duties and will increase the employee's skills in specific areas.

Since there are no institutions of higher education in North Dakota that prepare rehabilitation professional counselors at the Master's Degree level, North Dakota, at the present time, collaborates with Utah State University, University of Wisconsin Stout, and Montana State University Billings to prepare rehabilitation professionals.

North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation receives and distributes information such as rehabilitation journals, Rehabilitation Briefs, National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Research Materials, topics researched by the Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, as well as videos and printed materials on related rehabilitation issues. Information is disseminated through the state email system and hard copies, CDs, DVDs are sent through the mail.

Vocational Rehabilitation supports participation in professional organizations by encouraging attendance and providing registration and travel expense for professional organization meetings and conferences. A number of vocational rehabilitation personnel are active members and hold leadership positions in professional organizations.

Central Office staff is involved in the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act and training has been provided as needed.

5. Communication With Diverse Populations

Vocational Rehabilitation provides personnel to provide services to individuals who have limited English speaking ability. In several regions where minority populations are more predominant, Vocational Rehabilitation staff have attended training on the customs and culture of minority groups. These materials are available to all Vocational Rehabilitation staff. In addition, the annual training needs assessment typically identifies a need for cultural awareness training. This training has been, and will continue to be, conducted in the regions that request it, with other regions invited to attend. Training was held at the annual statewide training conference in 2007.

Vocational Rehabilitation provides personnel or obtains services to accommodate clients in need of appropriate modes of communication. Agency staff members who have an interest are encouraged to take classes in Braille and sign language. In regions that do not have personnel trained in alternate modes of communication, this service is purchased.

6. Coordination of the CSPD and Inservice Training

Vocational Rehabilitation coordinates CSPD efforts with the CSPD requirements under IDEA. The Department of Public Instruction is represented on the State Rehabilitation Council where information on training conferences is shared and invitations extended to attend each other's conferences and other training activities. Vocational Rehabilitation is also a member of the statewide Transition Steering Council that has broad-based representation of agencies involved in various aspects of Transition. Members of the Transition Steering Council, including one Vocational Rehabilitation staff, were also part of multi-agency team that participated, for the fourth year in a row, in a National Transition Training Conference to identify ways to improve Transition services in the state. In October 2008 Vocational Rehabilitation is collaborating with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction to hold a joint transition-focused training conference entitled *"Discover the Magic Through Teamwork"*.